

## The Journey

*'The next train at platform 2 is the 16:42 West Midlands Railway service to Worcester Foregate Street calling at...'*

The mind switches off from the list of stops known too well. The illuminated 'on-time' sign wasn't lying as we leave the retro grandeur of Birmingham Moor Street heading west to Stourbridge Junction.

The train descends into a subterranean world beneath city centre streets. Soon darkness recedes as we reach the corporate hub of Birmingham Snow Hill where hordes of plugged-in bodies blindly seek a return to the suburbs.

The enigma of the Jewellery Quarter is the next stop. A name harking such beauty shielding a drab station devoid of urban bustle.

The city centre skyline fades into the distance as we head towards The Hawthorns. No game today so a wasteland appears in contrast to this congested carriage. Fast forward to Saturday, and heaving masses will turn this stop into a raucous rabble of excited fans.

Smethwick Galton Bridge has a dramatic vista from the outside with twin level platforms and a steep gorge housing one of numerous canals crisscrossing the region. Changing trains here late at night is an eerie experience. Not today as we continue an onward journey pleasantly running on time for a change.

Langley Green: the curse of the Worcester bound train. You can also toss Old Hill and Lye into the mix as part-used stations making this a longer journey than usual. Sympathy to passengers who rely on the infrequency of these stops.

*'The next station is Rowley Regis. If you are leaving the train here please ensure you take all luggage and belongings with you.'*

Minor relief as you know the carriage will start to seriously shed its bulk. A spacious car park greets the arrival. Soon to be less populated as park 'n' ride commuters take pride in the Co2 they've just saved.

Whoever thought the Blackheath rail tunnel was a good idea had little consideration for irritated passengers losing their phone signal for a perceived eternity. The Old Hill stop is a blink as they desperately fiddle to restore connection.

Cradley Heath: the gateway to the Black Country where buses await alighting passengers heading to Merry Hill for their retail fix. Almost there, but a reminder this train stops at Lye. Damn!

Numerous tracks, a nostalgic signal box; stranded engines and carriages mean we are approaching the multi-purpose Stourbridge Junction. A mass evacuation leaves behind a dwindling number of Worcestershire bound passengers.

The journey has a minor postscript. The shortest branch line in Europe, we are told. The crown jewel of the region's rail network grandly escorts you on a three-minute bumpy ride to the final destination of Stourbridge Town. Hail the quirky shuttle.